NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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NEW IMAGE FOR FRENCH COMMUNISTS?

ANNCR:

THE RECENT CAMPAIGN BY THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY AGAINST VIOLATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH IN THE SOVIET UNION REPRESENTS A DEEP CHANGE BROUGHT ABOUT BY EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS. VOA'S JOHN BUE HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY HAD A SOLID REPUTATION FOR STALINISM WHICH WAS ONLY SLIGHTLY DENTED WHEN SOVIET-LED TROOPS MARCHED INTO CZECHOSLOVAKIA SEVEN AND-A-HALF YEARS AGO. FRENCH PARTY LEADERS DISAPPROVED OF THE INVASION BUT IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS CRACKED DOWN ON PARTY MEMBERS WHO APPEARED TOO VOCALLY CRITICAL OF THE SOVIET UNION. THIS POLICY RESULTED IN THE EXPULSION OF LEADING COMMUNIST INTELLECTUAL ROGER GARAUDY, THE HEAD OF THE MARXIST STUDIES CENTER IN FRANCE.

THE PARTY'S PERSISTENTLY NEGATIVE IMAGE ON THE ISSUE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS PROVED A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON FRONT WITH THE FRENCH SOCIALISTS WHO GIVE THE ISSUE TOP IDEOLOGICAL PRIORITY. THE COMMON FRONT TOOK YEARS TO HAMMER OUT, AND EVEN AFTER IT WAS ESTABLISHED NEARLY FOUR YEARS AGO, THE TWO PARTIES KEPT SNIPING AT EACH OTHER. EVEN MORE SERIOUS FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY, IT WAS LOSING VOTES TO THE SOCIALISTS. ANALYSTS FEEL THE LOSSES OCCURED LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE COMMUNIST'S POOR IMAGE ON THIS ISSUE AT A TIME WHEN THE SOLZHENITZYN AND SAKHAROV CASES HIGHLIGHTED THE FATE OF DISSIDENTS AND

SEVERAL OF THEM CAME TO SETTLE IN FRANCE.

IN A RECENT TELEVISION APPEARANCE, FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL GEORGES MARCHAIS WENT FURTHER THAN EVER BEFORE IN CASTIGATING THE SOVIET PARTY FOR WHAT HE CALLED ITS "INSUFFICIENCIES" IN ENSURING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. WHILE LAUDING THE COMMUNIST SYSTEM AND REAFFIRMING COOPERATION WITH COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, HE MADE CLEAR THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY WILL CONTINUE TO CRITICIZE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE USSR. THE FRENCH PARTY PLANS TO MAKE A NEW "FREEDOMS CHARTER" THE CENTER-PIECE OF ITS TWENTY-SECOND CONGRESS NEXT MONTH. MISTER MARCHAIS ALSO SAID HE WILL PROPOSE THE ELIMINATION OF THE TERM "DICTATORSHIP OF THE ROLETARIAT" FROM THE FRENCH PARTY'S STATUTES.

POLITICAL ANALYSTS FEEL THE FRENCH PARTY'S SWITCH HAS BEEN ADDITIONALLY PROMPTED BY EVENTS OUTSIDE FRANCE. THE PORTUGUESE COMMUUISTS' HARD-LINE POLICIES HAVE GIVEN POOR RESULTS FOR THE MOMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ITALIAN COMMUNISTS OPENING TOWARD THE CENTER EARNED THEM UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESSES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS LAST YEAR. IT MIGHT BE PREMATURE, HOWEVER, TO THINK THE FRENCH PARTY IS READY TO GO ALL THE WAY TO REJOIN THE IDEOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY OF ITS ITALIAN COMRADES, AS ILLUSTRATED BY A BRIEF INCIDENT DURING MISTER MARCHAIS' TV PROGRAM.

IN A ROME-PARIS ROUND-TABLE WITH ITALIAN POLITICAL LEADERS ON THE CABINET RESIGNATION, MISTER MARCHAIS REFERRED TO THE ITALIAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTICIPANT AS "REPRESENTING REACTIONARY FORCES." THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY REPRESENTATIVE IMMEDIATELY BOUNCED BACK AND SAID

"WE DO NOT AGREE, AND IN CERTAIN CITIES, WE WORK HAND-IN-HAND WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS".

THE SWITCH IN THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY'S STAND ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION HAS BEEN PRAISED BY FRENCH SOCIALIST LEADERS AND MAY WELL IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES.

IT IS ALSO LIKELY, FOLLOWING MISTER MARCHAIS' MEETING LAST YEAR WITH ITALIAN PARTY LEADERS, TO MAKE IDEOLOGICAL COOPERATION AMONG THE MAJOR WEST EUROPEAN COMMUNIST PARTIES EASIER AND, CORRESPONDINGLY, THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET PARTY MORE DIFFICULT.

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